

Frequently Asked Questions

Being open and honest with donors isn't just a nice idea; it's our obligation to each and every contributor. That's why we've provided answers to questions we frequently receive.

Q. I hear that United Way is heading in another direction. How is it different from what they used to do?

A. United Way was founded many years ago to raise money in a single campaign for a whole group of non-profit agencies like The Salvation Army, Red Cross and Scouts. The money was divided among the agencies and they used it as they needed it.

However, with the changes in technology, economy and marketplace, United Ways all over the country were becoming less and less effective. Donors could easily choose whom to support over a web site – they didn't need a “middle man” to collect their gifts. In addition, the problems in our communities were not improving. Millions of people still suffered from homelessness, hunger and lack of decent employment and health care. The process wasn't working.

That's when United Ways realized that they had been raising money for years to treat symptoms rather than root causes. This realization prompted a major shift in philosophy – from fundraiser to problem solver. Marion County United Way, along with thousands of other local United Ways, began to research issues in the community and set priorities. We began to ask questions like, “Why are people homeless and how can we help them to find a home and become self-sufficient?” If they are homeless because they can't find a job, then we need to help them become employable and find employment. If they are homeless because they don't understand how to budget, then we need to teach them budgeting skills. The object is not to give them a meal and a bed in a homeless shelter – it's to make sure they never need a homeless shelter again.

In order to accomplish this kind of lasting community change, we have to shift our focus from what agencies need to what our community needs. We have to become much more than a fundraiser. We have to become a researcher of and educator on community issues, a full partner in addressing those issues and an expert in measuring whether we're making progress. It's a huge change, but one that makes sense.

Q. Why is United Way focusing on impacting only education, income, and health?

A. United Way has chosen the targets of education, income, and health because they are the building blocks for a good life. We all need a quality education that leads to a stable job, enough income to support a family and good health to thrive.

Q. What percentage of the campaign funds go to United Way's overhead?

A. Marion County United Way's overhead expenses for 2016 represented 16-17 percent of the campaign. The expenses include all campaign supplies and expenses, year-round community planning, year-round community service and agency relations, as well as year-round billing and collection of pledges. This is far **better** than the 35 percent endorsed by the Better Business Bureau and the Nation Charities Information Bureau.

One reason we're able to keep campaign expenses so low is that businesses that believe in the United Way concept provide valuable in-kind services. For example, many years an experienced marketing professional with volunteer time and talent to design our campaign brochures, newspaper inserts, posters and a web site, and all the local media have been very generous with their coverage. We don't have room here to list the many, many contributions that local businesses make to the success of the United Way campaign, but without their support, our campaign costs would be much higher.

Q. Why does United Way need paid staff?

A. United Way is led by hundreds of volunteers who commit their time, talent and resources to our agency and the charities supported by the campaign. A small staff is needed, however, to coordinate volunteer efforts and provide professional expertise and support services. United Way of Marion, Crawford and Wyandot Counties has six full-time staff members.

Q. How do I know that my gift is spent wisely?

Fifteen volunteers from the community--representing all donors--study agency budgets, audits, programs, goals and achievements each year. These volunteers, who make up the Allocation Committee, work with the 15 volunteers who make up United Way's Board of Trustees to determine allocations for the coming year. The campaign goal is then based on the proposed allocations. Meanwhile, United Way is constantly working to ensure that the community's needs are being met without duplication of services and waste of dollars.

The financial records of United Way and those of the charities it supports must be reviewed annually by independent auditors.

Q. There is one United Way charity that I really like. Shouldn't I give all my money directly to that agency?

A. Most people have one particular agency that they prefer, which is fine, and you can designate that your pledge goes solely to that agency when you contribute \$25 or more by noting it on your pledge card. You may also note that you want your donation withheld from a certain agency. By contributing to United Way, however, you **efficiently** fund a network of health and human services. If everyone gave funds to just one cause, such as food for the hungry, there would be an overabundance of food but insufficient funds to support an emergency shelter, hot meals for the homebound, access to medical care or shelter for victims of domestic violence. The spending plans of all the member agencies, as well as the community's needs, are taken into consideration when the Board of Trustees sets the United Way campaign goal.

Q. Why should I give when I know someone who was turned down for help by a United Way agency?

A. United Way funds programs that assist people through area non-profit agencies and programs (for example, it redistributes campaign money to Goodwill Industries to provide

emergency clothing). The United Way office does not maintain any discretionary funds to provide direct assistance to individuals.

If a person feels he or she was mistreated or turned down unfairly by a United Way-funded program, please contact us at the United Way and give us a chance to explore the circumstances of the case. We need to know the specific situation, the agency, the time and date and the individual who had the problem so that we can check into it thoroughly and provide a written response. Unfortunately we can't control what happens in other counties, so we urge you to contact that county's United Way if there is a problem. It is important to remember that every United Way is locally administered and operates independently of every other United Way.

Q. I was pressured several years ago to give to United Way and I still resent it.

A. United Way neither condones nor accepts coercion to give. It is counterproductive to the concept of volunteer giving, it creates long-lasting hostility, and it reduces contributions in the long run. Occasionally, individual volunteers who are committed to the United Way system overstep the delicate boundary, going beyond educating potential donors and asking for a contribution and instead using pressure tactics. ASKING is a must. Pressure is a negative.

Q. I'm not giving to United Way because one of the agencies – MAPP – supports abortion.

A. Marion Adolescent Pregnancy Program (MAPP) has never supported abortion. MAPP was founded to provide support and education to pregnant and parenting adolescents. Please understand that in the state of Ohio, minors may not obtain an abortion without parental consent or permission of the judge of juvenile court. When funding is available for its voluntary school classes, MAPP counsels more teenagers on the importance of abstinence than any other organization in the county.

However, if you do disagree with the funding of any United Way agency, please don't punish all of the agencies and the clients they serve by refusing to donate. Consider instead noting on your pledge card that you would like your donation to be withheld from a specific agency, and United Way will gladly comply.

Q. Does United Way support Planned Parenthood?

A. United Way locally does not support Planned Parenthood and never has.

Q. I heard that most of the money that is given to United Way is sent outside the community.

A. United Way of Marion County is a totally local and independent organization. We are operated and administered by a local Board of Trustees made up of community volunteers. All decisions regarding fund raising, community planning and the distribution of campaign dollars are made by your local board. About 99 cents of every dollar stays here in Marion County. The remainder goes to:

- Ohio United Way, which provides data on needs, coordinates Ohio United Ways, monitors legislation and works with federal and local governments
- United Way Worldwide dues. UWW, in turn, helps provide visibility through its global advertising programs and offers additional resources and services. For example, it has negotiated agreements with major credit card companies to lower the service fees local United Ways pay to process credit cards pledges.

Q. My employees all work part time or earn minimum wage. I don't want to ask them to contribute.

A. Minimum wage earners and part timers are frequently among the highest percentage contributors to United Way. One reason they give is that they have personally benefited from many United Way agency services. No one should be pressured to give, but everyone should be given the opportunity.

Q. Why should I take our company's time and resources to run a United Way campaign?

A. Because the United Way agencies provide services for your employees and their families that improve their quality of life and help make them better employees. Moreover, United Way agencies meet human service needs for all residents of Marion County, which helps make Marion a good place to live and work.

Q. Why does United Way take on new agencies when it is difficult to raise enough money for the agencies it already has?

A. Donors entrust United Way with their gifts of close to a million dollars every year. Community volunteers on the Board of Trustees and Community Investment Committee are extremely sensitive to competing needs in our county and endeavor to redistribute the money responsibly on behalf of all contributors.

It is sometimes said that United Way supports various local *agencies*, but - more accurately - it supports needs in the community through programs. These programs are designed to produce positive impacts in four primary areas: education, financial stability, health, and safety net. The 2016 campaign will help 32 programs at 15 area agencies.

United Way's support for each of these programs is committed on a calendar year basis. Each program must reapply for program funding annually and demonstrate the impact it has in one or more of the focus areas. And annually, allocations committee volunteers:

- Re-examine Marion County's most pressing needs,
- Re-evaluate the performance and resources of the programs seeking funds,
- Develop a ranking of the programs most closely meeting the community's needs,
- Estimate how much money the upcoming campaign might realistically generate, and
- Recommend funding levels for each program.

This approach keeps the emphasis on what matters most and the allocations process responsive to changing needs and resources.

Q. Has United Way stopped funding Scouts?

A. United Way has funded Scouts for many years and anticipate funding them for many more. We are no longer funding either the Boy Scout or Girl Scout Council, which are the administrative bodies for Scouting. The United Way Board felt it was more important to directly provide scholarship assistance to local boys and girls. A specified amount of money has been set aside for distribution by a committee of five local Scout leaders. The Scouts and their unit leaders may apply for help with summer camp, uniforms, badges, etc. throughout the year. The applications are reviewed by this local group, who then directs where United Way should send scholarship assistance and in what amount.

Many local Scout leaders have told us that they approve and appreciate this change in Scout funding.

Q. Why isn't United Way funding the Marion YMCA any longer?

A. The YMCA withdrew their request for funding several years ago. United Way is certainly open to working with the YMCA in the future if there are projects that or partnerships that make sense for both parties.